

Prayer Meeting

Topic: **HEROES OF THE FAITH.**

Heb. 11: 32-40.

For Week Beginning May 16.

We are in the midst of the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of one of the mightiest men of valor, in defense of the faith, that have lived since the days of the apostles. It may not be too much to say that, as combining learning, courage, piety, sagacity and industry, with intellectual and spiritual power, John Calvin has had no equal since apostolic times.

While men of achievement are numerous in this age, achievement through self-sacrifice and at the peril of life itself is rare. The Biblical conception of heroism is that which in the exercise of faith, hazards self with all temporal interests for the sake of a worthy cause.

In this roll-call of nobles found in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the predominant characteristic is that of the abandonment of personal temporal interests out of allegiance to the supreme duty of doing God's will.

After having described the distinguishing services of some of the more eminent of the saints the inspired writer finds the number of worthies too great for individual description, so proceeds to group them. These are not even mentioned in order of time, but as they seemed to pass in rapid review before the inspired vision. Some of them subdued kingdoms, as for example Joshua and David in their conquest of the Canaanites and neighboring tribes. Men like Barak, Gideon and Sampson had wrought mighty deliverances for the nation, in obedience to God's command. Others reformed the government, executed justice and accomplished signal fulfillments of divine promises to the people. Some had displayed extraordinary physical prowess in the exercise of faith in God. David and Sampson had each slain a lion, and Daniel had spent a night unharmed in a den of hungry lions. Others "quenched the violence of fire," an evident allusion to the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. Elijah, Elisha and Jeremiah were among the notable instances of those who, through faith, had "escaped the edge of the sword." There are numerous instances of those who "waxed valiant in fight and turned to flight the armies of the aliens." It is generally supposed that the allusion here is to a portion of uninspired history in which Judas Maccabeus is recorded as having vanquished the forces of Antiochus Epiphanes and secured independence for himself and his people.

"Women received their dead raised to life again," as in the case of Elijah and the widow's son. There were numerous cases of torture, doubtless many of them known through tradition, as well as those known through the inspired writings, in which martyrs refused to accept deliverance from excruciating suffering, although it was offered on condition of renouncing the faith. They chose death rather than life on such terms because in the exercise of their faith they expected "a better resurrection." Here we are plainly taught that the faithful of old believed in bodily resurrection, based on inspired teaching. Others endured many kinds and degrees of suffering—mockings, scourgings, imprisonments, yet remained steadfast in faith. There were worse tortures still. "They were stoned," "sawn asunder," "slain with the sword," became wanderers living in destitution.

Such a high estimate is placed on the character of these martyrs to conscience and truth that they constitute a class "of whom the world was not worthy." "They obtained a good report through faith" and on some exalted plane as yet not fully known to us, they and we are together to be made perfect through their fortitude and faith.

The pre-eminent need of the present age, as of all ages, is

not more learning, nor more wealth, nor more genius, but stronger character, more inflexible fidelity to truth, a surer faith.

Young People's Society

BIRDS AND FLOWERS.

Topic for Sunday, May 23: **Lessons from the birds and flowers.** Luke 12: 24-28.

DAILY READINGS.

Monday: Doves and purity. Matthew 3: 16, 17.

Tuesday: Eagles and strength. Exodus 19: 4-6.

Wednesday: Vultures and corruption. Matthew 24: 23-28.

Thursday: The rose and beauty. Song of Solomon 2: 1-7.

Friday: The lily and purity. Song of Solomon 6: 1-3, 9-11.

Saturday: The thistle, uselessness. Matthew 7: 16-19.

The pages of nature have been beautifully written and on them we may read much of the wisdom and goodness of God.

The book he has given as his direct revelation is far clearer and surer, but in its way nature tells us much that we may believe.

Inspiration used nature to illustrate and enforce the lessons of grace. Jesus himself was a master teacher from what he saw about him.

James' Epistle is perhaps more packed, in its short compass, with illustrations drawn from nature than any of the books of the Bible. Read it and mark its numerous and striking references.

In his sermon on the mount the Master makes telling reference to the birds and the flowers. It was a great lesson of trust which they taught for him and to men.

As common and of as little value as were the ravens, God fed them; they had not to sow or reap or gather into barns. "How much more are ye better than the fowls?" The argument is from the less to the greater.

The lilies are decked with a beauty which the glory of even Solomon could not rival. But it was not by their own hand. Their garb of beauty was not spun or woven by their own hands. God did it all.

"If, then, God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? Seek not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink."

"Neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after; and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

The eagle was the symbol of strength, the dove of purity, the sparrow of little value, the vulture of corruption. "Ye shall mount up with wings, as eagles." "I bare you on eagles' wings." "One sparrow shall not fall on the ground without your Father."

The flowers in their fragrance, their beauty, their usefulness, their purity, told of Christ. He was "the rose of Sharon." He was "the lily of the valley." As they adorned the hedges and fields and plains, so he adorns every life into which he comes and makes it fragrant with his love.

The sun paints the flowers and develops their fragrance. The Sun of Righteousness shines upon the believer's heart and brings out the color and life which make him like the Master. Out in the sunlight and not in the shadows is the place to grow.

The fairest flowers often grow in the foulest places. They are not defiled thereby, but live in purity and separateness all the time. Christ prays not that his people be taken out of the world, but that they be kept from evil. He would leave them there to make the world better.